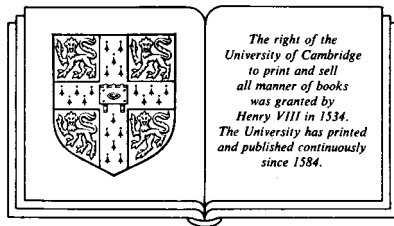


JOHN OF WALES

*A Study of the Works and Ideas of a
Thirteenth-Century Friar*

JENNY SWANSON



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INTRODUCTION

The appearance and growth of the Orders of friars, and the rise of the universities, are central features of the thirteenth century. The close link between friars and universities has long been recognised. The Franciscan and Dominican Orders, founded early in the century, quickly established the aim of providing informed preaching to the population as a whole. Informed preaching had as its prerequisite informed teaching: the friars moved rapidly into the university sphere, and soon established themselves at the heart of it. Franciscans and Dominicans alike organised their own schools and teachers, but their members played a major part in wider university life.

It is against this background that we must set the British Franciscan scholar John of Wales, who arrived in Paris from Oxford by early 1270, if not before. He was already an established scholar, having been lector to the Oxford Franciscans a decade previously. He must have been acquainted with fellow-Franciscans like Roger Bacon, John Pecham and Bonaventure. Bacon, who joined the Oxford Franciscans in c. 1257, had been John of Wales' junior at the Oxford convent for many years, and some of his Paris visits may have overlapped with John's. Pecham and Bonaventure were already resident in Paris when John of Wales arrived. John appears to have been close to Pecham, who as Archbishop of Canterbury later summoned him from France to act as his emissary to Llewellyn of Wales. John would probably have attended Paris sermons (and perhaps lectures) by both these fellow-Franciscans, and perhaps also by Dominicans such as Thomas Aquinas. They in turn may have attended his own sermons. This group of men walked the same streets at the same time, used the same buildings and facilities and had many of the same interests. Yet today the other men are well known, their importance long established, while until recently John had largely fallen into obscurity.

This can be accounted for by the nature of his works. While St Thomas Aquinas and St Bonaventure mainly produced scholastic

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theology, biblical commentaries and, in the case of Aquinas, commentaries on philosophical texts, John of Wales put his knowledge to a different purpose. Although he wrote his quota of biblical commentaries (some of which circulated for centuries under a mistaken attribution to Bonaventure), he devoted most of his time and energy to the production of a stream of encyclopaedic preaching aids. Both encyclopaedias and preaching aids proved of immense value during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and both they and their writers merited very high regard at this time. John of Wales was himself both well known and highly respected in late thirteenth-century Paris and subsequently. His preaching aids fell into neglect when such products were no longer used in their own right for their intended purpose. They then became matter for history, and the high regard in which they were once held has tended to be overlooked.

Yet preaching was of major importance in the later Middle Ages. The growth in the production of preaching aids, whether encyclopaedic or not, is closely bound up with the thirteenth-century explosion in preaching. And this in turn is tightly bound to the increase in the number of learned men, caused by the establishment of the universities. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had shown awareness of a greater need for preachers. The friars and the universities between them provided a means to meet this need, but an educated mind and a copy of the Bible were not in themselves sufficient tools to supply the necessary informative preaching and pastoral care. The variety of preaching aids available from the later thirteenth century reflects the breadth of the need: handbooks on sin, on penance, on vices and virtues; collections of *exempla* or illustrative tales with which to enliven sermons, biblical concordances, skeleton sermons and technical treatises on the art of preaching all flourished. There were also assorted encyclopaedias, some of which – like Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius* – were intended by their authors to have a potential use as a preaching aid. Encyclopaedias were welcomed by preachers as a valuable source of varied material with which to inform and illustrate their sermons.

John of Wales benefited from the developments in encyclopaedic organisation made by scholars like the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais. Like Vincent, he showed a wide range of reading and a fondness for accurate reference to his original source. But his perennial motive for writing was to provide tools for preachers, and particularly young preachers. This influenced the way in which his

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preaching aids were set out. Where many such aids, as for example the *Manipulus Florum* of Thomas of Ireland, used an alphabetic organisation by topic, and where Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius* used a historical framework, John tended to use as his basis groups of divisions which would be very familiar to preachers, and easy for them to work through. The virtues, the vices, the Ten Commandments, the divisions of philosophy, the groups and sub-groups which make up human society – each of these was utilised as the framework of one of John's texts.

I have concentrated on John's four earliest preaching aids: the *Breviloquium de Virtutibus*, *Communiloquium*, *Compendiloquium* and *Breviloquium de Sapientia Sanctorum*, which appear to have been written as a group in Oxford and Paris sometime between 1265 and 1275. One cannot always draw a clear line between encyclopaedias and preaching aids, but these four works by John were primarily intended as preaching aids, and it is in this context that I have examined them. In addition, John's *Communiloquium* is a rich source of material about his own interests and attitudes, when examined in the light of thirteenth-century society. For this reason, *Communiloquium* has been given the central role in this book.